The Dead Sea Scrolls

Discovery and Meaning

An Illustrated Lecture by Hershel Shanks

Bonus Material Included!



REVISED EDITION

The Dead Sea Scrolls—Discovery and Meaning

Hershel Shanks

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The Dead Sea Scrolls—Discovery and Meaning

Hershel Shanks



The Dead Sea Scrolls have been called the greatest archaeological find of the 20th century. And they are. Everybody knows of the Dead Sea Scrolls. I was once in a taxi cab in Kansas City and the driver had no idea that I was in any way connected with the Scrolls, and he raised the subject.

Although everyone knows of the Dead Sea Scrolls, almost no one can tell you what they say. What do they really tell us? What do we know that we didn't know before? That's the question that I'm going to try to answer.

In fact, I'm going to try to answer three questions:

1. What do the Dead Sea Scrolls tell us about the development of Early Christianity?
2. What do the Dead Sea Scrolls tell us about the Hebrew Bible?
3. What do the Dead Sea Scrolls tell us about the history of Judaism?

But before I do that, I would like take a trip with you to the site where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found, on the shores of the Dead Sea in the Judean Desert.

Part I—The Complex History of the Dead Sea Scrolls



We're going to start from Jerusalem. This is a view of Jerusalem, which you can hardly see because it's on the top of a ridge. As we come down on the east side of Jerusalem, we are in the Judean Desert. The rains that come from the Mediterranean rise up to the highest ridge in the country and drop all of their water there. There is no water left for the eastern side. This produces the desert you see.

This ridge is like a backbone up the central part of the country. If you want to go north/south in the central part of the country, you really have to stick to this ridge. Otherwise, if you go to the east or to the west, you will be going up and down these huge wadis (dry riverbeds), as you see in the picture.



As we go further into the desert, we can still see Jerusalem receding on the ridge, with a herd of sheep in the foreground. Unfortunately you see fewer and fewer sheep these days, and you're more likely to see a Bedouin driving a truck than riding a camel.



Only 15 minutes from Jerusalem, you come upon a monument marking sea level. We're halfway from the highest point in the country to the lowest point on the face of the earth. And in another 15 minutes we are at the Dead Sea itself. Unfortunately, you can no longer see the salt mounds that you see in this picture. The Dead Sea is receding by 3 feet a year because too much water is being siphoned off before it gets to the Dead Sea.



This view of the Dead Sea shows a small coastal plain covered with vegetation. Behind that plain, we see the limestone cliffs. At a more southerly point on the shore of the Dead Sea, the cliffs go all the way down to the water. There is not coastal plain.





This is a closeup of the limestone cliffs, and you can see it's pock-marked with caves. In one of the caves pictured here, the first Dead Sea Scrolls were found by two Bedouin.

Here we are inside one of these caves. You might imagine that all you had to do to rescue the Dead Sea Scrolls was to find them in a cave like this. But that's not true. The scrolls themselves were often buried under a meter or more of debris and bat guano. The ceilings of the caves had often caved in from seismic disturbances, burying the fragments still further. This is in the Great Rift Valley, which goes all the way south to Africa and north to Lebanon and Syria. There are frequent earthquakes, which have their effect on the interior of caves like this. They are dark and smelly and generally unpleasant.



This cave overlooks the ruins of Qumran and the Dead Sea. Beyond are the mountains of Moab on the other side of the Dead Sea, today modern Jordan.



These are the two Bedouin, including Mohammad edh-Dhib ("The Wolf"), on the right, who are said to have discovered the first seven intact scrolls from what has become known as Cave 1. Supposedly edh-Dhib was searching for a lost sheep; he threw a stone into a cave, thinking that the sheep might be in there and be scared and come running out. But instead of bleating sheep, he heard the cracking of pottery. When he went in, he discovered pottery jars in which were some ancient scrolls.



What happened then is obscure, but what we know is that in one way or another the scrolls and, more importantly, the scrolls that would be subsequently discovered, found their way to a Bethlehem antiquities dealer nicknamed Kando. Kando was the middleman for the Bedouin.





Three of the seven scrolls were acquired by the Israelis through a professor of archaeology at Hebrew University named Eleazer Lipa Sukenik, pictured here, who traveled to Bethlehem on a bus during a very violent time before the end of the British Mandate over Palestine—November 28, 1947. In Bethlehem Sukenik acquired three of the seven Dead Sea Scrolls, including a scroll of the book of the prophet Isaiah.

When Sukenik returned to Jerusalem, with the three scrolls in a paper bag, the place was in pandemonium. The Jews were celebrating, singing and dancing in the streets because the United Nations had just voted by a two-thirds vote for the partition of Palestine into a Jewish state and an Arab state, creating a Jewish republic for the first time in 2,000 years. Sukenik saw that as almost messianic: to recover a 2,000-year-old scroll, from the time the Jews last had their own state, on the same day that a Jewish state was again being created was a moving spiritual experience for Sukenik.



The other four original scrolls came into the possession of the Metropolitan Samuel, the Syrian Christian cleric who led that community in Jerusalem. He attempted to sell the scrolls, but when he couldn't sell them, he brought them to the United States in the hope of increasing their value and finding a buyer there. They were displayed in the Library of Congress. But he still couldn't sell them. So in desperation, the Metropolitan Samuel placed this ad in *The Wall Street Journal*, advertising four Dead Sea Scrolls for sale.



MISCELLANEOUS FOR SALE

"The Four Dead Sea Scrolls"

Biblical Manuscripts dating back to at least 200 B.C. are for sale. This would be an ideal gift to an educational or religious institution by an individual or group.

Box F 206, The Wall Street Journal.



As it turned out, Sukenik's son, the great archaeologist Yigael Yadin, was in the United States at the time. Someone pointed out to him the ad in *The Wall Street Journal*. Here is a picture of Yadin, with his bald head, watching as another scholar tries to pry apart some small fragments of ancient scrolls. Having seen the ad in *The Wall Street Journal*, Yadin made a clandestine effort to purchase them. He was purchasing them on behalf of Israel, but he was fearful that if the Metropolitan Samuel knew that he represented Israel the Metropolitan would not sell them to him. So Yadin used some fronts and in that way negotiated the purchase—four intact Dead Sea Scrolls for $250,000, which was an enormous bargain even then.

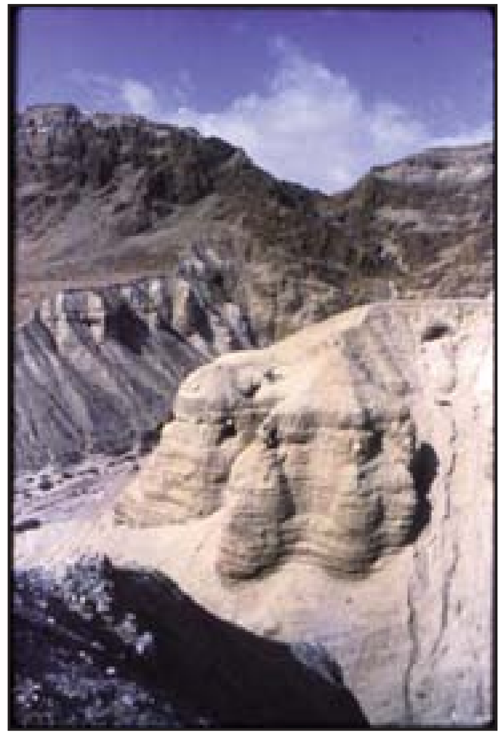
Did the Metropolitan Samuel know that he was selling them to Israel? I think he did. The reason that he couldn't easily sell them to anyone else was that he couldn't show good title. Qumran was then controlled by Jordan, so Jordan had a claim, which it asserted, to title to the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Metropolitan must have suspected that only Israel would buy them. Israel wouldn't be concerned with that difficulty of getting good title. So Yadin purchased them on Israel's behalf.

The sale had an unfortunate consequence for the Metropolitan Samuel and his Syrian community in the United States, who lived largely in New Jersey. The papers were badly drawn, and the United States sued the Metropolitan Samuel, claiming that the sale was a taxable transaction. Most of the money from the sale of the four Scrolls went to the United States government.

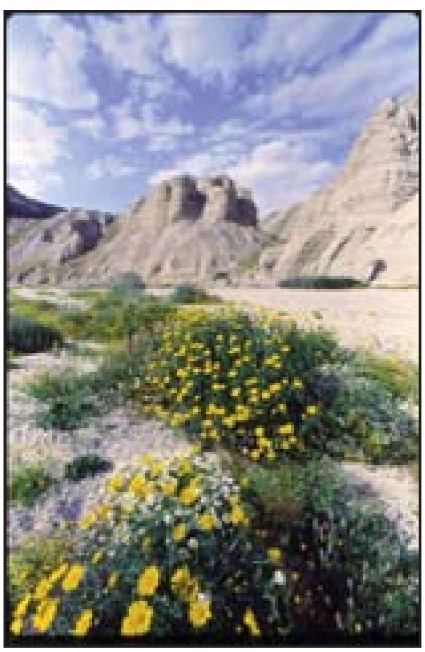
With the purchase by Yadin, all seven of the intact Dead Sea Scrolls found by the Bedouin were now in Israeli hands. A special museum, the Shrine of the Book, was built to house them. The architecture mimics certain aspects of the Scrolls. The white dome is shaped like the lid of the scroll jars in which the scrolls were found. The contrast between the black slab and the white dome is meant to echo the Wars of the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness, the subject of one of the scrolls.







We have looked at pictures of the Dead Sea, of the coastal plain and of the precipitous and almost uninhabitable limestone cliffs behind the plain. But between the limestone cliffs and the small plain by the sea is a marl terrace of much softer rock. It is on this marl terrace that Qumran was originally built. In this aerial view we see the ruins of Qumran. The marl terrace sits beside a wadi, or a valley (*nahal* in Hebrew, *wadi* in Arabic) through which a day or two a year the winter rains flow down to the sea. We see the wadi on one side of the picture, as well as some finger-like protrusions of the marl terrace in which are caves. These are man-made caves in which thousands of scroll fragments were found.



This is the Wadi Qumran in the spring of the year when the flowers are out. We are looking up at those same fingers in the marl terrace. The holes at the top of the fingers are the caves, including the famous Cave 4, which had more than 500 different scroll manuscripts in it. Visitors are not allowed to go into Cave 4 today, but we were permitted, and here I am crawling down a hole in the top of the cave into Cave 4.



This is the inside of Cave 4. It's much cleaned up since the days when it was excavated and the 500 manuscripts were found in it. Incidentally, they were all in tiny fragments, not an intact scroll among them. One theory is that this was the library of the sect, an Essene library. You can see holes in the wall at various levels. It's been suggested these were the fittings for shelves, which were placed around the cave and on which the scrolls were stored. Eventually these shelves broke and the scrolls fell down and were covered with debris and bat guano and rocks from the earthquakes. By the time they were found in the 20th century, they were all in small fragments, chewed on by rodents.



This next photo shows you the condition in which these fragments came to the scholars—little bits and pieces, sometimes in cigar boxes purchased from the Bedouin through Kando. When the fragments were cleaned and placed under glass, they looked like jigsaw puzzles with 90 percent of the pieces missing, as we see in this example.





This is the complete Isaiah Scroll, which was found in Cave 1 by the Bedouin and is known as Isaiah A. It is open to Chapter 40, verse 3, which states, "A voice cries out in the wilderness: Prepare a way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God." This passage is quoted in all three Synoptic Gospels, Mark, Matthew and Luke.



Part II—What Do the Scrolls Tell Us about Christianity?

Now that we're all familiar with the site of Qumran, and the cliffs and the caves where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found, we can begin to answer the questions that I posed at the outset.

I'm going to give you the quick and simple answer to all three questions: what the scrolls tell us about Christianity, about the Hebrew Bible and about Judaism. And the simple, quick answer is that all of these questions must be answered in the context of other questions of other scholarly disciplines. In other words, there's really nothing that you can point to in the Scrolls and say, "Aha, this is astounding! We didn't know this before!" On the other hand, there is almost no question that you can ask, beginning at about 300 B.C.E. to 300 C.E., a six-hundred-year period, about which the scholar doesn't have to ask, "Do the Scrolls have anything to say about my question?" That's what I mean by context. The scrolls are important and may be important in asking every conceivable kind of question in this 600-year period, from shortly before the earliest Scrolls were written, through the beginning of the rabbinic period of Judaism.

Incidentally, this places a tremendous burden on scholars. Imagine a New Testament scholar who speaks Greek like you speak your mother tongue. He's an expert in the New Testament, and suddenly you tell him, "If you really want to understand this, go learn Hebrew and Aramaic and study the Dead Sea Scrolls to see if they have some bearing on the question you are asking." So the first and basic point I want to make is that the Scrolls become important in the context of other questions.

Now I'm going to consider a couple of representative questions in each of the three categories that I mentioned, Christianity, Hebrew Bible and Judaism of this period, to illustrate how the Dead Sea Scrolls are important to almost any question that you can ask in these areas.

> The Scrolls provide a context for the search for what scholars call the Historical Jesus.

First, Christianity. I suppose that in a sense the Dead Sea Scrolls do undermine a certain kind of what I might call a naïve Christian faith. I remember talking to a great Catholic Dead Sea Scroll scholar, Father Joseph Fitzmyer. He told me that the Scrolls are no threat to the "mature Christian." But, in a sense, they do undermine what I call a naïve understanding of Christianity. It's the faith that believes that when Jesus came down he brought with him a new message that stunned his listeners—something unlike anything people had heard before. This view of Christian doctrine is really no longer valid. The scrolls demonstrate very clearly the Jewish soil out of which Christianity grew. Not the message, but the life of Jesus is unique and remains unique in history. But the message has parallels; it has roots in Jewish history.

So the Scrolls provide a context—you remember the word "context"—for the search for what scholars call the Historical Jesus. That's a growing research area in modern scholarship. And in the attempt to reach an understanding of the Historical Jesus, scholars paint very different pictures of the man. Some see him as a prophet, others see him as a revolutionary, and still others see him as a reformer.

Some see him as a rabbi. Another prominent scholar sees him as a Cynic philosopher. So there are different portraits of Jesus, but they all agree on one thing: That he was thoroughly Jewish. All scholars agree that he lived his life here on Earth as a Jew. It was not just incidental that Jesus happened to be born Jewish. If you want to know about Jesus, you have to know about the Jewish world in which he lived. And that's where the Dead Sea Scrolls come in. The Dead Sea Scrolls provide the Jewish context of early Christianity.

What does it mean to be the Son of God? The Egyptian Pharaohs were deified as the sons of God. The kings of Israel were also the sons of God.

Let's see if we can be more specific. I'm going to turn now to a Dead Sea Scroll fragment. Almost all the Dead Sea Scrolls were fragmentary; not more than a dozen are intact in any sense of the word. I'm going to talk about one of the fragmentary scrolls that has a very sexy name: It's called 4Q246. If that's too hard to remember, you can think of it as the Aramaic Apocalypse.

4Q246 or the Aramaic Apocalypse provides the context for a scholarly examination of the concept of the Son of God. 4Q246 says:

> Affliction will come on Earth . . . He will be called great . . . 'Son of God' he will be called and 'Son of the Most High' they will call him . . . His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom . . . He will judge the Earth in truth and all will make peace.

This was written a hundred years before Jesus was born. Luke 1:34-35, the famous Annunciation scene in which the angel Gabriel tells Mary that she will bear a son, reads as follows:

> He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High . . . of his kingdom there will be no end . . . he will be called the Son of God.

I don't want any one to jump to conclusions. It's most unlikely that Luke copied the Dead Sea Scrolls; rather they both came out of the same Jewish soil. In short, the Dead Sea Scrolls help us to understand the Jewish context out of which Christianity grew.

Let's talk about the Son of God for a minute. What does it mean to be the Son of God? Again, you have to look at the Jewish context. The Egyptian Pharaohs were deified as the sons of God. The Roman emperors were deified as the son of God. And now I'll tell you something that may surprise you. The kings of Israel were also the sons of God. In Psalm 2:7, the Lord tells the king, "You are my son/Today I have begotten you."

It's very important that we focus on the word "*Today* I have begotten you." The word is *ha-Yom* in Hebrew. The king of Israel became the son of God when he was installed as king. Scholars call this the Adoptionist Theory. In this sense of the concept of son of God, the king was not born the son of God but was adopted as the Lord's son when he became king. There are other sources in the Hebrew Bible in which the king is referred to as the son of God. For example, in 2 Samuel 7:14, the Lord says to King David through the prophet Nathan, "I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me."

In another context, all of Israel is the son of God. Look at Psalms 89:26: "You are my father, my God, the rock of my salvation." Or look at Hosea 11:1, "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my *son*."

You may say that these are figurative uses of the concept of son of God; they're not literal, you may say, as in the New Testament. Well, yes and no. There are some differences, but there are also some similarities. As a matter of fact, in the New Testament itself, we see a development of the concept of the son of God. For example, Paul, whose letters are the earliest documents of the New Testament, knows nothing of the virgin birth. In Paul, Jesus becomes the son of God at his resurrection. Read Paul's letter to the Romans, where Jesus was "declared to be the son of God, with power according to the spirit of holiness *by resurrection of the dead*" (Romans 1:3-4).

This comes very close to the Adoptionist Theory that we saw in the Hebrew Bible. This same concept is reflected in the Book of Acts, where Jesus becomes the son of God as a result of his resurrection. In Acts 13:32-33, Paul declares after the resurrection, "What God has promised to our ancestors he has fulfilled for us . . . by raising Jesus." Then Paul quotes Psalms 2:7, mentioned above, in which the Lord calls the king of Israel his son, and says, "Today I have begotten you." In this text from Acts, Jesus becomes the son of God "today"—when he is resurrected.

Elsewhere in the New Testament, however, Jesus becomes the son of God at an earlier point. Instead of becoming the son of God at his resurrection, he becomes the son of God at his baptism in the Jordan River by John the Baptist, which, incidentally, occurred a stone's throw from where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found.

As the New Testament recounts in the Gospels of Matthew 3:17, Mark 1:11 and Luke 3:22, a voice from heaven proclaims at Jesus' baptism, "You are my beloved son." According to some versions of these Gospel passages, the text then quotes the passage of Psalms 2:7: "Today I have begotten you." Jesus becomes the son of God at an earlier stage, not at the Resurrection, but at his baptism.

You don't have to be a scholar to see that this language is very similar to the Beatitudes in Matthew's Sermon on the Mount and in Luke's Sermon on the Plain.

Finally, in the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke, Jesus' status as the son of God is pushed back to his conception. This doesn't mean, however, that divine sperm was somehow inserted into Mary. What divine sonship really means is that Jesus had a special relationship to God from the very beginning, and it suggests that these Infancy Narratives are not intended to be taken literally. Otherwise, why would the Gospels trace Jesus' lineage to King David through Joseph?

Let's look at another central concept of Christianity and see how the Dead Sea Scrolls help us to understand the Jewish concept of the Messiah, *Moshiach* in Hebrew. Another fragmentary Dead Sea Scroll, called 4Q521, says, "The heavens and earth will listen to his Messiah . . . Over the poor his spirit will hover and will renew the faithful . . . He . . . liberates the captives, restores sight to the blind, strengthens the bent [compare Psalms 146:7-8] . . . He will heal the wounded and revive the dead and bring news to the poor [compare Isaiah 35:5-6; 61:1]."

You don't have to be a scholar to see that this language is very similar to the Beatitudes in Matthew's Sermon on the Mount and in Luke's Sermon on the Plain: "The blind receive their sight and the lame will walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up and the poor have good news preached to them" (Matthew 11:5/Luke 7:22).

If we want to plumb the original understanding of the Christian messiah, we must look at the Jewish understanding of the concept from which the Christian concept developed. *Moshiach* in Hebrew literally means "anointed." Kings and priests were anointed in their office by having oil poured on them. At *that* time they became the *Moshiach*, the anointed one, the messiah. The word had no other-worldly connotations originally. After the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple of Solomon in 586 B.C.E., the concept of Messiah, or *Moshiach*, became attached to the idea of the restoration of the Davidic dynasty, which had lasted for 400 years but which had ended with this devastating defeat. The idea that the Messiah would return as a descendant of King David is reflected in the Christian tradition mentioned earlier, which sees Jesus as being a descendant of David (incidentally, through his father Joseph).

Some scholars believe that this is what lies behind Jesus' birth in Bethlehem. Many scholars believe that Jesus was actually born in Nazareth. He was always called Jesus of Nazareth, never Jesus of Bethlehem. Other scholars, however, maintain that he was in fact born in Bethlehem. But those who say he was born in Nazareth are faced with the question, why does the story tell us that he was born in Bethlehem? The answer that they give is that Bethlehem was where David was born and Jesus, the messiah in the Davidic sense of the word, will be a scion of David and come from the town that David came from.

When in Jewish history the Davidic Messiah never appeared and the return to political independence seemed but a dream, the idea of the Messiah changed. It became a kind of spiritual messiah and an apocalyptic messiah who will come to rule at the end of time and relieve Israel's troubles. It is in this later development of the Jewish concept of *Moshiach*, the Messiah, that we must understand the nature of Jesus' messiahship.

There are many other similarities between Christianity and the Judaism of Jesus' time and earlier. I've already mentioned the Beatitudes. The way that the Qumran sectarians, the Essenes perhaps, interpret scripture is very much the way the New Testament interprets Hebrew Scriptures. Both apply words of the ancient Hebrew text to the present-day, as if the Hebrew writer were speaking of the fulfillment of the Hebrew scripture at the time that the interpreter lived. The idea of the coming of the end of time, the dualism of the sons of light and the sons of darkness, the communal meals, the importance of bread and wine—all these aspects of early Christianity are also to be found in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

If we want to plumb the original understanding of the Christian messiah, we must look at the Jewish understanding of the concept from which the Christian concept developed.

There are more than 900 different manuscripts that have been found in Qumran. Almost all are very fragmentary. Of the 900, more than 200 are manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible, so obviously there is more than one copy of many of the texts. The three most popular books are the Book of Psalms, the Book of Deuteronomy and the Book of Isaiah. Thirty-nine copies of the Book of Psalms have been found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, 36 copies of the Book of Deuteronomy and 22 copies of Isaiah. Interestingly, these are the three most frequently quoted books in the New Testament; the most important books to the Qumran

sectarians were apparently the most important books to the writers of the New Testament as well.

I don't mean to imply that there is any direct link between the Dead Sea Scrolls and Christianity. The Dead Sea Scroll sectarians were not early Christians. I've called attention to many similarities, but there are also many differences. The Qumran sectarians placed heavy stress on the Law, especially the purity laws. They were rigorous in their observance. It's easy to exaggerate the similarities between the Qumran sectarians and the early Christians. There is no direct link.

Part III—What Do the Scrolls Tell Us about the Hebrew Bible?

Now I'll try to answer the second question raised at the outset: How do the Dead Sea Scrolls help us to understand the Hebrew Bible?

As noted earlier, more than 200 Biblical manuscripts have been discovered at Qumran. They include every book of the Hebrew Bible except Esther and Songs of Songs (although there may have been a kind of version of Esther). But to talk about the Hebrew Bible is in a sense anachronistic. This was at a time before the Hebrew Bible. At this point in history there was no fixed canon, no authoritative list of sacred books. There was Torah (the Five Books of Moses), there were prophetic works, there were other works that became part of the Bible later and other very similar books that did not. For example, books like Jubilees, Enoch, the Temple Scroll, Judith, Tobit and Ecclesiasticus never made the final cut. They were rejected as canonical texts. Some of them were included in what became the Catholic Bible and are known as the Apocrypha (or Deutero-canonical). On the other hand, the Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes and Daniel did make the final cut and were included in what was to become the Hebrew Bible.

To talk about the Hebrew Bible is in a sense anachronistic. This was at a time before the Hebrew Bible.

But there is another kind of question that we ask of these books. Were there different editions or had they already been standardized? The answer is they had not been standardized, so at Qumran we have different versions of the same book. This is true of almost all the books and is especially true of books such as Exodus and Jeremiah. So the Biblical texts at Qumran were neither established as canonical nor standardized as texts.

To understand the contribution of the Dead Sea Scrolls to Biblical textual criticism, we have to review the situation before the discovery of the Scrolls. Before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the oldest texts of the Hebrew Bible were in two manuscripts from the 10th or possibly the early 11th century known as the Aleppo Codex and the Leningrad Codex.

These manuscripts—the Aleppo Codex, which was recovered partially after a fire and somehow brought to Jerusalem, and the Leningrad Codex, which is now in St. Petersburg—both of these nearly identical texts are what scholars call the rabbinic recension. If you want to know the precise text of the Hebrew Bible you have to go back to this rabbinic recension about 1000 C.E. This text is the work of

the Masoretes in Tiberias, who sought to standardize the various then-existing manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible. This rabbinic recension is referred to as the Masoretic Text, or MT for short. It is the basis for all Hebrew Bibles since then.

However, several earlier manuscripts of the Hebrew scriptures have survived, but not in Hebrew. These other texts have survived in Greek and are known as the Septuagint. The name comes from the legend that 72 scholars were assigned the task of translating the Hebrew scriptures into Greek for the Greek-speaking Jews of Alexandria beginning about the third century B.C.E., and supposedly all of them came up with an identical text. (The name Septuagint comes from the Greek word for 70).

The three most famous of these Septuagint manuscripts date from the mid-fourth to early fifth century C.E. and they're named Vaticanus, for the one in the Vatican; Sinaiticus, for the one found at the Mt. Sinai monastery (and now mostly in the British Library); and Alexandrinus for the one that came from Alexandria (and also now in the British Library). There are many thousands of variations between the Greek Septuagint and the Masoretic text of the Hebrew Bible. Which variations are to be preferred? Before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the answer was clear: the Masoretic Text. That was the official *textus receptus* (received text) of Judaism. The Greek Septuagint was treated with suspicion. It could have been a bad translation, or the Greek translators could simply have changed the Hebrew text.

The Dead Sea Scrolls have changed all that. Among the Hebrew manuscripts found at Qumran are what we might call proto-Septuagintal manuscripts; that is, these Hebrew manuscripts are the base texts that were ultimately translated into the Greek Septuagint.

What we learn by comparing the Hebrew base text to the Greek text of the Septuagint is that the translators were very good and faithfully translated the Hebrew text. Why, then, are there differences between the Septuagint and the Masoretic text? The answer is that the Septuagint is a translation of a slightly different Hebrew text than the Masoretic text. In a sense, this gives greater authority to the Septuagint. As a great Biblical text scholar and editor-in-chief of the Dead Sea Scroll publication team, Emmanuel Tov, has remarked, "The Masoretic text is no longer the center of our textual thinking."

In many cases, where there's a variation, the text of the Septuagint is to be preferred. Let's take a couple of outstanding examples. In Deuteronomy 32, the Masoretic text talks about how God is distributing land to the various nations. According to the Hebrew text in its Masoretic version, God is distributing these lands according to the sons of Israel. This doesn't make much sense because some of the geographical areas are obviously not Israelite and the distribution seems to be occurring before there was an Israel. The Septuagint, however, does not read, "according to the sons of Israel" but "according to the sons of God." This makes a lot more sense, but it's not hard to understand that it would be objectionable to the later rabbis. For most scholars, however, the reading of the Septuagint is to be preferred.

Another example: At the end of 1 Samuel 10, we read about Nahash, king of the Ammonites, who attacked the Israelites and the city of Jabesh Gilead. When the people from the city sued for peace, Nahash said he would accept the Israelite

surrender only after gouging out the right eye of the Israelite men. This is curious because the text gives no reason for this gratuitous cruelty. In a copy of 1 Samuel 10 from Qumran, however, we have an entire paragraph that explains why Nahash proposed this gruesome penalty as his condition for surrender. Some Israelites who had rebelled against Nahash had fled to Jabesh Gilead. Gouging out the right eye was the standard punishment for rebels.

> The Qumranites didn't care if one Biblical text was exactly like another.

Apparently at one point the Hebrew scribe lost this entire paragraph as a result of what scholars call *homeoteleuton*. When the scribe was copying this text, he saw the word Nahash, and when he looked again his eye lit on its later appearance in the paragraph. The paragraph has been recovered from the manuscript at Qumran.

The Biblical Dead Sea Scrolls manuscripts are also important because they reflect tolerance for a variety of textual variants. This period was marked by what scholars call textual fluidity. The Qumranites didn't much care if one text was exactly like another. Variations were accepted. Some manuscripts are similar to what became the Masoretic text, what we might call proto-Masoretic. Others were similar to the Greek Septuagint, what we might call proto-Septuagintal. Still others were similar to neither.

Some texts at Qumran try to harmonize variations. For example, in the commandment to observe the Sabbath, Exodus and Deuteronomy give different reasons for the commandment. In one it's because the Lord brought the Israelites out of Egypt. In the other it's because God created the heaven and Earth in six days and rested on the seventh day. In one manuscript from Qumran, these two texts are harmonized so that the rationale for Sabbath observance is both the Exodus from Egypt and the fact that God rested on the seventh day.

Some people might feel that the Bible is threatened by this kind of analysis. For me it is enriched. Whether or not we accept the divine origin of the text as it has come down to us, it bears the marks of man—struggling as always to produce a divine text. The result is riches beyond measure.

Part IV—What Do the Scrolls Tell Us about Early Judaism?

Now we come to the third question: What do the Dead Sea Scrolls tell us about early Judaism? In a way, the answers to the previous two questions, what the Scrolls tell us about early Christianity and what the Scrolls tell us about the Bible, are really also addressed to this third question. Everything that the Dead Sea Scrolls have to say illuminates the history of Judaism. The Dead Sea Scrolls are the principal Jewish religious literature between the end of the Biblical period and the Mishnah—a period of about 350 years from the Book of Daniel, in about 150 B.C.E., to the compilation of the Mishnah, in about 200 C.E.

One thing that the Dead Sea Scrolls emphasize about Judaism is its enormous variety. Some time ago, scholars talked about normative Judaism. They don't do that much anymore, although they talk about common Judaism. But this implies that there were a number of other Judaisms and Jewish movements. We knew

about the Pharisees and the Sadducees. We also knew about the Essenes from Pliny, Josephus and Philo, but we didn't have any of their literature, which we now have.

In addition, there were Zealots and Sicarii and Hellenes and Therapeutiae and Boethusians and Herodians and Hasidim and Samaritans and Christians. Christians were originally a Jewish movement. And there are others we don't even know about. The rabbinic sources say there were 24 groups of heretics. Each claimed to be the true Israel. The Dead Sea Scroll community was one group that opposed the Jewish authorities who controlled the Jerusalem Temple.

This Dead Sea Scroll community is generally thought to be the Essenes, although there are a significant number of scholars who dispute that. At any rate, whether they are Essene or not, they had a different calendar than the Jewish authorities who controlled the Temple. This indicates that in some ways the ancient Jewish groups were more diverse than modern Jewish movements, where we have Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist Jews. Imagine a Jewish movement today that didn't even observe Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the holiest day of the Jewish calendar, on the same day as other Jews. Well, that's the case with the Dead Sea Scroll community. They had their own calendar, and they observed the holidays according to that calendar. In addition they had a number of other holy days and festivals that we know nothing about from the Judaism that has come down to us.

One of the things we learn about the Jewish community from the Dead Sea Scrolls, which was only hinted at in the earlier literature, is the apocalyptic element—the emphasis on the end of time, the emphasis on restoration at the end of time and on divine judgment. In many ways, it was out of this element of Judaism that Christianity arose. In a way, we are back to learning about Judaism as it affects early Christianity.

> Ancient Jewish groups were more diverse than modern Jewish movements. Imagine a Jewish movement today that didn't even observe Yom Kippur on the same as other Jews.

Another area that we are learning more and more about, including from the Dead Sea Scrolls, is the importance of purity. The Talmud, in Tractate Shabbat 13b, tells us that "purity broke out in Israel," presumably at this time. That is certainly true if we look at the Dead Sea Scrolls, but also at archaeological discoveries. We have here a coming together of archaeology and the text of the Dead Sea Scrolls. We find in Jewish villages, for example, certain kinds of stone vessels because stone vessels were not subject to impurity.

The Dead Sea Scrolls also reflect very strict purity rules. In one very revealing Dead Sea Scroll, which is known as 4QMMT, we have a text that contrasts the rules of purity of the Qumran community, the Dead Sea Scroll community, with the purity rules of the Temple authorities in Jerusalem. The Dead Sea Scroll sect is much stricter.

I'll conclude with an example of this contrast in purity laws. I call it The Case of the Up-Jumping Water. If you have a pitcher with some water in it and both the pitcher and the water are pure, then what happens when you lift up that pitcher and pour water into an impure bowl? Well, it's not hard to conclude that the water that's in the impure bowl is now impure even though it was pure when it

was in the vessel from which it was poured. But the more difficult question is whether, when that stream of water from the pure pitcher hit the impure bowl, did the impurity jump up that stream and make the pitcher and water in it impure? The Temple authorities held that the water in the pitcher remained pure, while the Qumran sect held that it was impure. That gives you some idea of the strictness of the Dead Sea Scroll community.

I hope you now understand not only *that* the Dead Sea Scrolls are important but *why* they are important.

Bonus Material

Spotlight on Non-Biblical Scrolls

More than 200 Biblical manuscripts were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls—mostly small, fragmentary pieces of the books that are well known from the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, including Deuteronomy, Isaiah and Psalms. But what about the other scroll fragments that didn't contain Biblical texts?

Several of the documents among the Dead Sea Scrolls were writings that had never been seen before by the scholarly community. Some of the non-biblical scrolls, including the Genesis Apocryphon and the Book of Enoch, were similar to the canonical books, but they contained substantial rewritings, reinterpretations or elaborations of the Biblical texts and were not ultimately included in the traditional Jewish canon (although the Book of Enoch is canonical for some branches of the Eastern Orthodox Church).

Others among the Dead Sea Scrolls have been classified as strictly sectarian writings that were most likely produced by and for the unique community that collected and hid the scrolls. (Most scholars believe that this was an Essene community living at Qumran, near the caves where the scrolls were found.) Two such sectarian scrolls are a halakhic, or legal, text known as the Temple Scroll and a militaristic document about the ultimate battle between the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness known as the War Scroll. Both of these scrolls were discovered relatively intact compared to the tiny scraps that constitute the vast majority of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Although the Biblical scrolls have revealed important insights about the formation and variations of the Hebrew Bible, the non-biblical scrolls have opened up whole new worlds of study and shed light on the rich variety of thought within Judaism at the end of the Second Temple period. In the following section, we present a closer look at three of these scrolls: the War Scroll, the Temple Scroll and the Book of Enoch.

The War Scroll

Brian Schultz, Bar-Ilan University



The Scroll of the War of the Sons of Light Against the Sons of Darkness (or in short, the War Scroll) is one of the first seven Dead Sea Scrolls to have been discovered. Its genre is unique, describing an eschatological war that is to put an end to evil in the world. It is a kind of military manual, intended for priests, describing their role in providing ceremonial, cultic, and even tactical leadership to the army of the Sons of Light.

The introduction (Columns 1–2) gives the historical background to the war and the sequence of its development. It will begin with a "War against the Kittim," a short but intense battle against Israel's eschatological enemy (Numbers 24:24). After six rounds during which the Sons of Light will alternate between gaining and losing the upper hand, God will intervene with his mighty hand to miraculously bring victory.

This battle will introduce a second stage in the eschatological war, the "War of Divisions," one that will be launched after six years of war preparations during which Israel's exiles will be able to return to Jerusalem. The fighting itself will be spread out over 35 years, with breaks every sabbatical year, until the entire world is conquered.

Columns 3–9 are a series of rules (called serakhim in Hebrew), describing the trumpets and banners to be used, the different infantry and cavalry units, various purity rules, as well as tactical matters. These rules, originally intended for the War of Divisions, were eventually adapted to fit the War against the Kittim, as in Columns 15–19. Columns 10–14 are a series of prayers, imported from other sources, to be recited on the battle field.

From Cave 4, seven additional scrolls related to the eschatological war were found (4Q491-7), either copies of the War Scroll or compositions closely related to it, or perhaps its sources. They further support the impression gathered from the War Scroll that it had at least two stages in its composition, a first dating to the Maccabean period (Columns 1–9), and a second (Columns 10–19) intended to adapt the composition to a new reality resulting from the Roman conquest of Judea in 63 B.C.E.

The Temple Scroll

Magen Broshi, former curator of the Shrine of the Book, The Israel Museum in Jerusalem



The Temple Scroll is the longest Dead Sea Scroll (over 28 feet, preserved almost to its entire length) and one of the most important. It was excavated by Bedouin in Cave 11 in 1956 (since then no more scrolls have been discovered at Qumran).* The Dead Sea Scrolls can be divided into three main categories: Biblical, sectarian and other. The Temple Scroll is sectarian, that is, it belongs to the Dead Sea sect, identified by most scholars with the Essenes. It was composed, most probably, in the second part of the second century B.C.E., approximately 200 years before the destruction of the Second Temple.



The scroll is a halakhic (legal) composition, a rewriting of Pentateuchal passages, dealing with the laws as they were interpreted by the sect (mostly laws that differ from the laws of normative, Pharisaic Judaism).

In the Pentateuch the Lord speaks to Moses and Moses speaks to the people. Here the Lord speaks directly to the people in the

first person singular, and the style tries to imitate the language of the Book of Deuteronomy, but numerous slips betray its late origin.

Five major subjects are dealt with in the scroll: the Temple, the king's statutes, the feasts, the festival sacrifices, and laws of purity. More than half of the scroll, however, is devoted to the Temple and the Temple City, hence its name. The members of the sect did not participate in the cult of the Temple that existed in their period because they regarded it as unclean. The temple described in the Temple Scroll is an ideal edifice that was never built.



According to the scroll, the sect had a calendar of its own that was different from the calendar of the rest of the Jewish people. In addition to the regular Jewish feasts, the sect celebrated festivals of the first fruits such as the Festival of the First Wine and the Festival of the First Oil.

The law code of the sect is characterized by its harsh and ultra-conservative laws. For instance, they prohibited sexual relations in Jerusalem, and they prescribed that lavatories were to be built at a distance of about a mile away from the Holy City.

Note

*It was recovered in 1967 and published in 1977 (Hebrew edition) and 1983 (English) by Yigael Yadin.

The Book of Enoch

George W.E. Nickelsburg, The University of Iowa



The "Book of Enoch" (1 Enoch) is a collection of texts composed between about 350 B.C.E. and the turn of the era. It is the earliest extant example of an apocalyptic blend of Israelite prophetic and wisdom theologies best known from the Book of Daniel, and it witnesses the variety within Israelite religion in the Greco-Roman period.

Two myths shape the Book of Enoch. The first, related to Genesis 6:1–4,* ascribes the origins of evil to the rebellion of certain angels who mated with women and begat a race of giants that devastated the earth and whose demonic spirits continue to produce sin and misery. According to the second myth, Enoch (as said in Genesis 5:21–24) was taken to heaven, where he learned the secrets of the universe and of the coming judgment.

The Enochic texts claim to be Enoch's revelations transmitted through his son, Methuselah. The various parts of 1 Enoch were composed in Aramaic and translated into Greek, and from Greek into ancient Ethiopic, in which version alone the entire collection has survived.

*This refers to the episode in Genesis when "the sons of God went in to the daughters of humans, who bore children to them," thus creating a race of giants called the *Nephilim*.

Qumran Cave 4 yielded fragments of 11 Aramaic manuscripts of parts of 1 Enoch that cover perhaps one fifth of the Ethiopic text, as well as nine Aramaic manuscripts of "the Book of the Giants," a text not included in 1 Enoch.[i] The 1 Enoch manuscripts attest both to how closely the Ethiopic text corresponds to its Aramaic prototypes in some places and to where it differs in others. The Giants fragments indicate that the Enochic tradition was richer than 1 Enoch suggests. Missing at Qumran are fragments of the Book of Parables (1 Enoch 37–71), a Jewish text that provides a context for New Testament "Son of Man" christology. The absence of the Book of Parables from Qumran probably indicates that this expression of Enochic theology developed in circles different from those directly ancestral to the group that collected the texts at Qumran. The other Enochic writings were authoritative at Qumran, however, and were popular among early Christian writers as well. The Enochic texts remain a canonical part of the Bible of the Ethiopian Church.

Note

[i]For the Qumran fragments, see any comprehensive translation of the scrolls. For the whole of 1 Enoch, see George W.E. Nickelsburg and James C. VanderKam, *1 Enoch: A New Translation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004). For a commentary, see George W.E. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1: A Commentary on the Book of Enoch, Chapters 1–35, 81–108* (Hermeneia: Minneapolis, 2001).

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